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Mr Daniel Hartley
Principal
Abbey View School
The Old Grammar School
Gloucester Road
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Dear Mr Hartley

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Abbey View School

Following my visit to your academy on 6 January 2016, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the academy since the most recent section 5 inspection. Please also pass my thanks on to the staff and pupils I met during my visit.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in May 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order to become a good academy.

However, progress is slow. Many of the actions taken have been to ensure that the systems and procedures required for the academy to run smoothly are in place. At this time, these actions have had limited impact on securing significant improvements in the quality of teaching and in pupils' behaviour. The Principal, senior leaders and governors need to ensure that:

- all teachers use the information they have about individual pupils to set higher expectations for pupils' work and challenge them to work at a level closer to what they are capable of
- poor behaviour in lessons is dealt with consistently
- staff are robust in insisting that pupils are in lessons when they should be.

Ofsted may carry out further monitoring inspections and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the academy until its next section 5 inspection; I recommend that this academy receives at least one further monitoring visit before it is inspected again.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the Principal and the Chair of the Governing Body to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. Informal discussions were held with members of staff and pupils over lunch and throughout the day. The academy's self-evaluation and action plan were evaluated. Lessons were visited with the Principal to look at pupils' work and talk to them about it.

Context

The new Principal took up post on 1 September 2015. There were other staff changes during the autumn and at the start of this term. The roles of the other two senior leaders have been clarified. Two teaching assistants with backgrounds in youth work took up post at the start of this term.

This small alternative provision academy was established as a free school by Chipping Campden School, Cleeve School and Tewkesbury School, as the CCT Trust, in September 2013. These schools commission most of the places at the academy. However, an increasing number of other secondary schools within Gloucestershire now commission places in the academy.

At the time of the visit there were 30 pupils in the academy: eight in Years 8 and 9; six in Year 10; 16 in Year 11; and no post-16 learners. No places have ever been commissioned for post-16 learners. The aim of the academy is for most pupils to be re-integrated back into their mainstream school or transfer to specialist provision. However, most of those in Year 11 will stay in the academy until the end of the year. As a result, pupils spend varying periods of time in the academy and there is an ever-changing pupil population that makes establishing good, well-adhered-to routines difficult.

Main findings

Since taking up post in September 2015, the Principal has established the basic systems and procedures necessary to ensure that the academy runs smoothly. Policies have been reviewed and developed to ensure that they set the high expectations required and match best practice 'on the ground'. While the review of governance is not complete, training for governors means that they are now much better equipped to provide the Principal with a good balance of support and challenge. Contact with parents has improved and is more frequent. There have also been improvements in the communications and flow of information with the commissioning schools. Staff morale and confidence have improved. Their training

needs have been identified and some actions already taken to further develop teaching skills. As a result of these changes, the academy is now at a point where more rapid improvement can be secured. However, systemic weaknesses in teaching and pupils' continuing poor behaviour have limited the pace of improvement and will continue to do so unless addressed rapidly and effectively.

The Principal, supported by the Chair of the Governing Body, has established a clear intention that the focus of the academy is on preparing pupils well for their next steps: return to their mainstream school; transfer to another school or provision better suited to their needs; or, for those staying in the academy until the end of Year 11, progression to the most appropriate post-16 study programme or apprenticeship. This vision provides all staff and pupils with a clear sense of purpose.

When pupils join the school, a detailed analysis is undertaken to provide a good depth of understanding of their personal circumstances. The analysis includes, for example, their current levels of achievement, social skills, behaviour and any potential barriers to their progress. There is a good focus on establishing what pupils can and cannot do in reading, writing and mathematics and in some other subjects. Teachers are provided with this information so that programmes for individual pupils can be designed. At this stage, this is not yet leading to lessons with a sharp focus on raising the achievement of those pupils who spend longer periods of time in the academy.

In lessons for longer-term pupils in Year 11, the expectations of what pupils can achieve are far too low and they are given work that is too easy or superficial. Too many pupils are out of lessons and are too often reluctant to move back into classrooms. The role of the two new teaching assistants will be vital in improving this unacceptable situation. Too many older pupils' behaviour is not good enough and some teachers too readily accept poor behaviour, including frequent bad language, in lessons. Some teachers seem reluctant to challenge these poor attitudes, fearing the possible consequences. However, the academy's monitoring shows that the number of incidents of unacceptable behaviour in and out of lessons has declined since the new Principal arrived in September.

Despite these problems, the academy is successful in working with individual pupils in Year 11 to prepare them well for post-16 study programmes. All of the pupils who left Year 11 last year secured places in a further education college or an apprenticeship; all are still on their course. The academy's leaders are developing better relationships that will enable them to track these young people for longer periods of time. All current Year 11 pupils plan to go to a college or secure an apprenticeship.

In lessons for younger pupils, there is a much calmer atmosphere and pupils seem to want to do well. The academy is successful in helping many of these pupils develop the attitudes, behaviours and resilience to move back to their mainstream

schools and stay there. There is excellent attention to the specific needs of each individual. Pupils in these classes are making better progress.

The progress made by some older pupils is significantly restricted by their poor attendance. However, in most cases, each pupil's attendance is better than it was when they were in their mainstream school. In some cases, this is a significant achievement. This helps in preparing these older pupils for life when they leave the academy. The academy's senior leaders are sensitive to each individual situation and work hard to provide a curriculum and programme that meets each pupil's needs well.

There are frequent and rigorous reviews of each pupil's all-round progress. Communications with parents are frequent and more purposeful. Communications with the commissioning schools are improving. The academy is mostly receiving more useful information about pupils from commissioning schools to enable the Principal and other senior leaders to plan effectively for each pupil. In return, the academy provides regular progress reports on each pupil and detailed guidance for those pupils re-joining their mainstream school. However:

- the Principal needs more explicit authority to ensure that the expert guidance and advice provided about what the pupil needs to do and about what the commissioning school needs to do to support successful re-integration is followed more robustly
- the academy often does not receive enough information from commissioning schools about those pupils who successfully re-integrate, to enable the Principal and others in the academy to undertake a detailed evaluation of the effectiveness of the specific actions they took and strategies they followed.

The academy is clear about its 'indicators of success', but these are not yet formally expressed in a way that will enable the Principal and the Chair of the Governing Body to monitor and evaluate progress. These indicators include factors such as successful re-integration; improvements in the attendance of individual pupils; the number of incidents of unacceptable behaviour during lessons, social times and over each day; and changes in the attitudes of individual pupils, as well as progress in, for example, reading, writing and mathematics. The Principal and governors need to develop this set of indicators into 'management information' that can be used to measure progress at key milestones.

External support

The Principal receives good support from the headteachers of the three schools that formed the CCT Trust. The Chair of the Governing Body is also supported well by governors from the three schools.

The academy has had no contact with the local authority. I suggest that the Principal makes contact with the executive headteacher and the operational headteachers of the three local authority alternative provision schools to share ideas and best

practice in this type of provision. The place of Abbey View within a strategic and coherent approach to alternative provision within Gloucestershire is not clear. The three CCT Trust headteachers currently tend to be the point of contact with other schools. While not removing the need for the Principal to spend almost all of his time in the academy to secure the further improvements required, he does need more opportunities to understand the wider context and use his expertise to influence decisions about alternative provision in the area.

I am copying this letter to the Directors of the CCT Trust, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Regional Schools Commissioner, the Director of Children's Services for Gloucestershire and the Education Funding Agency. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

James Sage
Her Majesty's Inspector